

Political Undertones of Hinduism in the light of the book *Why I Am a Hindu* by Shashi Tharoor

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Abstract— *Hinduism, as a religious section became political in Modern India. Political religiosity became a power-oriented system and Shashi Tharoor analyses different aspects of the origin, aims and activities of this system to amass power for the survival. This book brings to light, the formation of Hindutva, the political phase of Hinduism and the different layers of emphasis that it exerts over various fields of the country. This article concludes with the notion of Tharoor regarding the supremacy of constitution.*

Keywords— *Hinduism, Secularism, Hindutva, Constitution*



Religion has always been a popular subject for discussions and dissertations because there are disagreements between the views of religious apologists and the opposing, ideally atheistic, viewpoint. Given that the vast majority of people practice religion and view it as an integral part of who they are, it is noteworthy that the case for a religious viewpoint is widely accepted. However, the opposition argument does, in fact, raise a number of legitimate concerns that the former is unable to adequately address. In *‘Why I Am a Hindu’*, written by Shashi Tharoor one of India’s finest public intellectuals gives us a profound book about one of the world’s oldest and greatest religion. This essay attempts to analyze how much Tharoor rejects the idea of a monothilic nation. When Muslims first settled in the Indus valley in the ninth century A.D., they began using the term "Hindu" to differentiate themselves from the locals. It is therefore a fact that the term "Hindu" was initially utilized to describe indigenous people of Indian subcontinent, not their religious identity. People who lived in Hindustan—the region that lay beyond the Indus River—were known as Hindus. Instead of referring to the religion of the Indian subcontinent's inhabitants, the term "Hindu" was first used as a secular term to describe and set them apart. Consequently, the region south of the Indus River was designated as Hindustan. According to the old customs, there is therefore very little distinction between an Indian and a Hindu. Both terms are distorted versions of the original Sanskrit word Sindhu, which refers to rivers in

general and the Indus River specifically. The Muslim scholars named the people who lived in the subcontinent Hindus, whereas the Greeks dubbed them Indus. The Muslim scholars had some awareness of the region's religious beliefs and practices, but the Greek historians, who referred to the subcontinent as the Indus, understood very little about them.

People first began using the term "Hindu" to define their national identity, fight colonialism, and advance Indian nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along with setting their faith apart from Islam and Christianity, they also discovered a practical way to refute any idea of supremacy that the competing religions might have inferred or stated. The word was a more effective means of establishing one's identity against both the British and the local Muslims for educated modern Hindu of that era. Term Hinduism had been utilized in a limited meaning for a while to refer to Brahmanism or the Vedic religion. However, the name evolved to refer to all of the religious traditions that began with the Vedas and persisted for centuries when new reform movements emerged, which were essential in redefining and reorganizing the nation's social and religious traditions.

Tharoor begins his study of Hinduism by closely examining his personal beliefs before delving deeply into the religion. He discusses Great Souls of Hinduism, including Patanjali, Adi Shankara, Swami Vivekananda

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramanuja, and numerous more who significantly influenced Hinduism's core beliefs. He explores the most significant schools of thought in Hinduism, including the Advaita Vedanta. He skillfully outlines the teachings of the Gita and Vivekananda's ecumenism, examines with compassion the Hinduism of habit practiced by common believers, and explains key ideas and concepts of Hindu philosophy, such as "Purusharthas" and Bhakti, in simple language. He examines the various ways that political Hinduism manifests itself in the contemporary world, including acts of violence carried out by right-wing groups and their followers in the name of religion. He examines Hindutva, describes how it came to be, and goes into detail about the thought of its most important philosopher, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. *Why I Am a Hindu* (2018) is a groundbreaking and unique masterpiece that will be read and discussed both now and in the future. The author of this manifesto for the downtrodden explores the socioeconomic and cultural distinctions between other Hindus and Dalit-Bahujans (the majority, the so-called low castes) in relation to issues of death, Gods and Goddesses, family life, market relations, childhood, and, lastly, Hindutva (the ideology of the Hindu right). In addition to freedom of the press, human rights, Indian culture, and foreign affairs, Tharoor is a well-known speaker on India's politics and economy.

It is surprising to learn that, even though Hinduism is a very old religious history, the term that is used to describe it and set it apart from other religions is considerably more recent. There were no Hindus in ancient India. You had a bhakta, tantric, sanyasi, samkhya-vadin, Vedantin, Mimamsaka, Vaisheshika, Jina, Charvaka, Lokayata, Ajivika, rishi, muni, yogini, devi, Swami, Shiava, Vaishnava, Siddha, Buddha, and so on, but no Hindu. There were many other religious sects, ascetic communities, teacher traditions, and philosophical schools, the majority of which later joined Hinduism for historical reasons. To differentiate the indigenous religious customs of India from those that were practiced abroad, the term Hinduism was coined. The name persisted, much to discontent of many contemporary Hindus who saw it as a holdover from India's colonialism and foreign oppression. From the very beginning, Hinduism evolved in the same environment. Their shared cultural identity, national component, and several other characteristics are strongly related to India's social, political, and historical growth, as well as its people and culture. Their core beliefs are what constitute Hinduism. Thus, Hinduism can be considered a very old family of Indian-specific religious traditions. Hinduism's core is an undeniable reality, not a work of fiction or an artificial construct, even though its name is a colonial invention. In many forms, including Hindutva, this

argument is becoming more and more popular among the younger Hindu population.

It is a living tradition that reaches its millions of followers through their hearts, minds, and souls. Despite having a secular beginning, the term "Hindu" has come to be closely linked with the religious identity of over a billion people worldwide. The world is also linked to a wide range of organizations, ideologies, and religious groups. Hindus are renowned for being tolerant of various religions and belief systems, with the exception of a small number of fervent followers. There may be members of the same Hindu family who worship various gods and follow distinct paths. Some people think that Hindus face discrimination and that their leaders are treated disrespectfully both domestically and internationally. It is also true that religious fanaticism is growing among the Hindu population because of more awareness. Caste is used in place of class in this expression. Brahmins, or priests; Kshatriyas, or warriors and kings; Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers; and Sudras, or peasants and laborers, are the four primary classes, or castes, described in ancient writings. Panchamas, often known as untouchables, are a fifth class of individuals whose vocations require them to come into contact with filthy or unholy substances. The system is more difficult to deal with in the modern world, but in the past, the caste system was extremely rigid and kept individuals in distinct classes.

Many authors have utilized the title formula 'Why I Am...'. Karel Čapek (1924) *Why I Am Not a Communist*, Bertrand Russell (1927) *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Hans Küng (1987) *Why I Am Still a Christian*, Ibn Warraq (1995) *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, are well known throughout the world. Nearer to home are Kancha Ilaiah's incendiary *Why I Am Not a Hindu* (1995) and Bhagat Singh's *Why I Am an Atheist* (1930). Indeed, Tharoor's book title appears to be a deliberate reversal of the previous one, and possibly even of the topic.

Three main types of intellectual inquiry, cultural imagination, and political participation are all included in the comparative study of Hinduism. Initially, there are occasional attempts in premodern South Asia to describe similarities or correspondences between Islamic doctrines and Vedic worldviews. For example, al-Biruni described scriptural texts, cosmology, astronomy, and other topics in the 11th century, and Dara Shikoh attempted to draw attention to some similarities between Sufi and Vedantic thought in the 7th century. However, it is only with the progressive installation of the East India Company's administrative-legal apparatus in Bengal that the comparative endeavor of meticulously establishing correspondences between European and Indic conceptual

systems begins. Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin cultures were positioned at different points on an evolutionary continuum that was supposed to have culminated in the institutions and ideals of modernity by a variety of British scholars and administrators, as well as occasionally continental European figures, who started drawing vast comparative vistas in late 18th century. British Christian missionaries occasionally embraced the orientalist projections of a Vedic Hindu antiquity of pure humanity and the currently degraded popular Hinduisms. They then reinterpreted these temporal contrasts into their own comparative spectra of fragmented Hindu truths that ultimately led to the saving truth of Christ. Second, influential Hindu figures like Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan, and others creatively appropriated these orientalist-colonial imaginations of a pure Vedic Hindu antiquity. They created unique patterns of comparative scales to place the fundamental spirit of the European and Hindu civilizations. Third, in the early 21st century, the comparative analysis of Hinduism described in this introduction has drawn harsh criticism from a number of scholarly groups. According to these academic viewpoints, attempting to compare across cultural and religious boundaries entails positing transhistorical universals, which are claimed to cause epistemic damage to different conceptual systems by enclosing them in monolithic descriptions. A Hindu category and a non-Hindu category appear to have something in common, which is why the comparative study of Hinduism is sometimes accused of being politically dubious and culturally reductive. Thus, another fundamentally contentious issue in academic circles is the comparative study of Hinduism. Bibliography on "comparative study of Hinduism" can be divided into three groups, as this article indicates. First, the opinions that foreigners like Christian missionaries, Muslim tourists, and British colonial officials have about Hinduism. Second, the several types of critical insider reactions created by Hindu figures who established comparison scales between elements of Christian ideology and European modernity and recreated forms of traditional Hinduism. Third, the idea of the comparative study of Hinduism is said to be closely linked to the relationship between the classification of indigenous knowledges and persistence of colonial power imbalances, according to contemporary scholarly challenges to the coherence of comparative effort.

As Tharoor acknowledges, issue is that Hinduism is made up of numerous, frequently conflicting elements. Therefore, it is challenging to locate a legitimate and authoritative tradition that may serve as a mirror for Hindutva. The Vedanta, a profoundly philosophical, Brahmanical, and sensitive tradition, was created by colonialists and is now considered to be dominant. India

saw the development of a homogenized form of Hinduism while Orientalists, colonial administrators, and scholars at Western colleges worked to translate, codify, and simplify a complex philosophical system. Nationalists defended this as the cornerstone of Indian identity. Intellectual colonization has such power!

As a result, a highly textualized Hinduism was removed from both contestations and the social setting. According to philosopher J.N. Mohanty, the Vedic wisdom was continuously contested by both the philosophy's proponents and detractors. Philosophical schools that adhered to Vedas and those that didn't—the *Sramanic* tradition—were primary points of contention. There is a lot of self-criticisms in the Vedic tradition. For example, a significant strain of naturalism and atheism emerged in *Samkhya* philosophy, which was originally rooted in the Vedic tradition. Not much attention is given to this. A strong anti-Vedic materialism is fostered by the heretical materialist school of *Charvaka* philosophy, which is also not included in metaphysical conceptualizations of Hinduism. Critical ideologies both inside and outside of Hinduism have been spectacularly marginalized by the establishment of a hegemonic tradition.

Tharoor, for example, restates Vivekananda's contention that Buddhism finished the Vedantic tradition's task. However, challenge that Buddhism had presented to caste discrimination, ritualism, monarchical state, and Brahmanical dominance was neatly flattened out in Vivekananda's argument. All it did was incorporate Buddhism into Hinduism. We should consider why Hinduism excludes logical and critical ideologies. Perhaps India would not have been placed in the spiritual vs materialism category if a rational, empiricist, materialistic, and skeptical philosophical school like *Charvaka* were given priority in development of a Hindu tradition. With all its material injustices, casteism, and communalism, India has been portrayed as exotic and alien. This hasn't aided in creating a fair future. Even while our society is captivated by the mystical spirit, it nevertheless fails to acknowledge the magnitude of widespread injustices.

Indian citizens, including the country's sizable minority communities, are granted a wide range of rights under the constitution. All ethnic and religious minorities are treated equally in India, a secular, multicultural democracy with territorial citizenship. Tharoor denies creation of a monolithic nation and firmly believes that one must adhere to certain parts of Hinduism to be recognized as one.

The Indian constitution and the laws have been formulated for the welfare and protection of all its citizens irrespective of their religion except the personal

laws that regulate various aspects like marriage, divorce, adoption, etc. One of our most prized fundamental principles is secularism, which is in fact a cornerstone of a genuinely modern country. It is meant to imply that the state plays little or no part in internal issues. Nonetheless, in India, the unquestionably honorable and sacred cause of secularism has been seized by self-described left-liberal academics on the one hand, religious extremists and fanatics on the other, as well as opportunistic politicians. As a result, the debate over secularism in India has been highly divisive, with people accusing one another of being fascists and pseudo-secularists. This seems to be the cause of the mirage of an apparent drift towards the displacement of non-secular discourse in the country.

It can be concluded that Hinduism is not just a religion but a way of life a culture, a culture which encompasses people from across the country and belonging to various faiths. India's identity as a diverse, democratic, and secular country that provides stability in an increasingly unstable region and world is crucial to its survival. *Why I Am a Hindu* reminds that a multilateral - nationhood is the necessity and intention of the law of the land, the Constitution of India, and any effort to challenge it will destabilize the constitution.

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